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The Alchemist   
By Paulo Coelho

**Summary**: Santiago leaves his family at an early age to fulfill his dream of seeing the world. With a few coins from his father, he buys a small flock of sheep and travels out into the  
Andalusion countryside. The story begins with Santiago's arrival in a village where he will be selling wool; he is looking forward to once again meeting with the merchant's daughter,  
whom he has become affectionate of. Santiago visits with a Gypsy in hopes of having a recurring dream explained; in the dream a child wanders close to his flock and then begins  
playing the sheep. The boy then takes Santiago's hand and transports him to the Egyptian pyramids, where he learns of a hidden treasure deep within. The Gypsy interprets the dream  
at face value, saying that Santiago must visit the Egyptian pyramids and find this treasure. Disappointed with the response, Santiago meets a man on the street who claims to be the  
King of Salem. The King implants the idea of a Personal Legend, one's innate goals and dreams. Santiago must choose between staying with his flock or pursuing his dream in Africa.  
**Analysis**: The Alchemist appears to illustrate a complex array of human emotions and goals through a simple story about a Middle Eastern shepherd. The story so far has certainly  
evoked reflection within my own life, specifically about the idea of a Personal Legend and 'the world's greatest lie.' The author explains that a Personal Legend is "... what you have  
always wanted to accomplish. Everyone, when they are young, knows what their Personal Legend is (21)." Santiago then learns that 'the world's greatest lie' is that at some point  
humans lose control of their life to fate. I would agree that people are all born with certain unique aspirations, but the story makes it sound as if one realizes these aspirations at birth.  
Personally, my goals and views of the world are constantly evolving so I am skeptical of the idea of the Personal Legend. The idea of 'the world's greatest lie' intrigued me because I  
have seen many who have bought into the belief. Mr. Steed explained that we are each our own self and in control of our own fate; I have tended to agree with both Mr. Steed and the  
story. I have enjoyed the story thus far because it has challenged me to critically examine my own thoughts on goals and dreams.  
**Application**: In The Alchemist, Santiago has a recurring dream about a small child taking him to the Egyptian pyramids. The trait of curiosity seems to have proven resilient to time and  
culture; rather than accepting that the dream was in fact just a dream, Santiago consults with a gypsy and ultimately reveals his thoughts to the King of Salem. Santiago contemplates  
going to Africa and searching for this treasure, which supports the argument for man's innate curiosity. The need for affection and feelings of importance by humans are also illustrated  
by the story. This insight into human nature is shown by Santiago's desire to see the merchant's daughter, revealing that human affection has spanned time. With respect to human  
roles and behaviors, the species tends to be independent. While many children received education, Santiago left home at an early age to go explore the world. Students today leave  
home around the age of 18 for college or otherwise and tend to not return; humans' individualistic tendencies are supported by this fact. The last objective, human ideals, does not seem to directly apply to The Alchemist so far. While Santiago has pursued feelings of love and truth, there has been no mention of a search for perfection in any aspect of his life.